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Spotlight on Child Care



Alberta

Finding child care in Alberta

*There are
only two
lasting
bequests
we can hope
to give our
children.

One of these
is roots,
the other,
wings.*

— Hodding Carter

is a challenge for many working parents. The Government of Alberta has been actively working with parents, the child care sector, municipalities and other interested Albertans to help communities improve access to quality child care and ease the pressure families are facing.

Improvements have been made within the child care sector since the introduction of several programs including the following:

- Child Care Accreditation Program;
- Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance;
- Child Care Leadership Bursary Program; and
- Making Space for Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund.

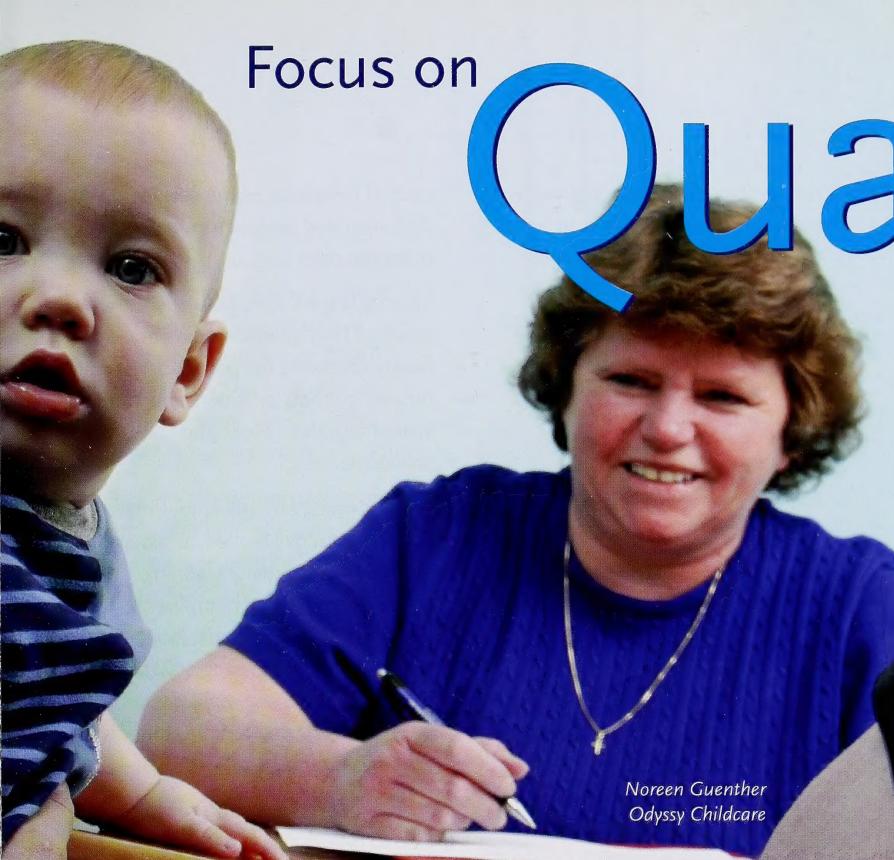
These unique programs support the delivery of high-quality child care. In this publication, real-life examples show how these positive changes have benefited parents, children and the child care sector overall.

Creating better access to quality, affordable child care is an important part of the mandate set out for me by Premier Stelmach. Children and Youth Services has taken a leadership role and developed a plan to support the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces by 2011 which continues to build on our successes.

The plan offers innovative solutions to help communities create new spaces in a variety of settings, such as family day homes, nursery schools, day cares and out-of-school care programs. I truly believe that solutions are in communities. I am pleased to see the progress we have already made and I am confident that by working together we will be able to better meet the needs of families requiring child care.

I look forward to building on our past successes and further enhancing child care programs within the province of Alberta.

Janis Tarchuk
Minister of Children and Youth Services



Focus on Quality

Professionalism and Quality Enhanced with Accreditation Program

The *Child Care Accreditation Program* was introduced in 2005 to support the delivery of high-quality child care throughout Alberta. It is a voluntary program offered to eligible licensed and approved child care programs serving children zero to six years of age.

At the end of March 2008, 296 child care programs became accredited, with an additional 228 child care programs working towards accreditation.

Child care operators are pleased to participate in the accreditation program. Not only does it raise the standard of quality of child care, accreditation also results in higher wages for child care professionals.

Noreen Guenther

Agency Owner and Operator, Odyssey Childcare, Lethbridge

When Noreen Guenther visits one of her 43 day homes in Lethbridge, she expects to see evidence of quality child care that exceeds basic requirements. Interest-based learning activities and culturally diverse toys that offer enriched experiences for children are the norm in the Odyssey Childcare network of day homes.

Noreen has owned and operated the Odyssey Childcare family day home agency since 1995 and takes great pride in ensuring that each child receives high quality care. Odyssey Childcare achieved a new standard of excellence when the agency received accreditation in December 2007.

For children and parents, accreditation has resulted in enhanced programming and learning activities. For instance,

during the accreditation process Noreen recognized a need to introduce more cultural activities into the day home program. Now, each day home provider has a collection of cultural items including world music, ethnic dresses and dolls that help to teach children respect for diversity.

Alberta Children and Youth Services provides funding for wage top-ups to all child care staff employed in programs that are participating in the accreditation program. For day home providers affiliated with Odyssey Childcare, accreditation has resulted in a wage top-up of at least \$243 per month over and above their negotiated contracts. ►

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More Child Care Professionals Return to the Field

Alberta's tight labour market has played a significant role in limiting the number of child care spaces available province-wide. Many qualified child care professionals have been drawn into other professions.

In 2007, the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance was introduced to encourage trained child care professionals to re-enter the field. The incentive is offered to staff who have a minimum of six months of child care experience and have been out of the child care workforce for at least six months. Child care professionals are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 over two years if they are willing to return to work full-time at a licensed day care centre or for an approved Family Day Home Agency.

At the end of March 2008, 160 child care professionals had taken advantage of the Staff Attraction Incentive program and returned to the workforce. The return of these staff members has helped operators maintain current programs and open new child care spaces across Alberta.

► Noreen supports the accreditation program and believes it helps to improve the delivery of quality child care in Alberta, by encouraging child care professionals to ask thoughtful questions about their programs and services, and making continuous improvements to benefit children.

"You want to have quality child care that goes beyond the basic licensing standards, and by applying for the accreditation it gives you access to knowledge and networking opportunities that improve quality," said Noreen. "I gained access to tools and experts that I otherwise wouldn't have had access to."

The accreditation process included writing a Quality Enhancement Plan, building an evidence-based portfolio and a two-day on-site visit with evaluators. Noreen admits it took nearly two years to build a portfolio that showcased

each of her 43 day home providers and demonstrated evidence of her agency's oversight role.

"The validators were fabulous!" Noreen recalls, "They spent two days at our facility reviewing the portfolio, learning how we support providers and families, visited four day homes and spoke with several parents."

After 10 years, she still enjoys matching children with day homes, assisting providers with activity planning and overseeing their compliance with provincial standards. Noreen is convinced that the accreditation program will serve to enhance professionalism within the child care field and improve quality overall.

"I would encourage anybody in child care to look at this process," concluded Noreen. ●

Kim Gansauge

Day Home Provider, St. Albert contracted with North Edmonton Family Day Homes

For some child care workers their decision to leave the field was a result of being offered higher wages elsewhere. For Kim Gansauge, the need to provide quality child care for her own two young children outweighed the benefits of returning to the workforce.

Kim holds a Bachelor of Education degree. For more than eight years, she worked in child care in different capacities including licensing and monitoring family day homes and as an early childhood outreach co-ordinator with Parent's Place.

With the birth of their second child, Kim and her husband searched high and low for quality child care close to home. In the end they decided it was more feasible for Kim to stay home with their children rather than return to work in another sector and pay for full-time child care.

"It's really challenging to find licensed child care in St. Albert," stated Kim.

Kim admits that she had often contemplated opening her own day home, but it was not until she learned about the wage top-up being offered that she seriously considered it. In September 2007, Kim joined North Edmonton Family Day Homes – an accredited day home agency – and opened her home to two other children.

"I wanted [my day home] to be a positive experience, and I did not want to have to take in a whole bunch of children to make it feasible," said Kim.

Kim reveals that the wage top-up she receives based on her years of education and training make it possible to keep her child-to-provider ratio low, while still making a living. She enjoys caring for her own two-year old and another two infants who attend her day home.

"Every day is different and fun. We do lots of baking, we're outside every day and I take advantage of the local recreation centre," said Kim.

As an educator, Kim is pleased she can offer quality programming focused on early literacy and language development to the children in her day home.

"I value what I do as much as a grade school teacher. It's nice to have extra financial assistance that recognizes my training," added Kim.

Over the next two years, Kim will become eligible to receive \$5,000 from the Staff Attraction Incentive Allowance. For now, she says that being recognized as a child care professional, not a babysitter, is a welcome improvement that makes her feel respected and valued. ●



*Kim Gansauge,
North Edmonton Family Day Homes*

Professional Development Further Enhances Quality Child Care

It is a fact that quality is enhanced when child care professionals further their formal education. In 2007, the Child Care Leadership Bursary Program was established for leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions. This program offsets the educational costs of staff who work in day cares, family day homes, out-of-school care programs and nursery schools.

Child care professionals are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 towards furthering their education through the bursary program. By the end of March 2008, 178 child care providers were approved to participate in the Child Care Leadership Bursary Program.

Nisha Sharma

Bursary Recipient, Wye Out-of-School Care, Sherwood Park

The hope of a better life and more opportunities for their children are the primary reasons that Nisha Sharma and her husband packed up their family and moved from India to Canada in 2001. Upon arriving in Edmonton, Nisha began training as a nursing attendant and quickly found employment at a long-term care facility.

Juggling shift work and providing adequate child care for their two young children proved to be difficult for the Sharma family. So, after three years of coping with their new reality, they decided to find Nisha a different career that would allow more time for their family.

For nearly two years now, Nisha has been operating Wye Out-of-School Care for six to 12 year olds in Sherwood Park, which is jointly owned by her husband. Nisha has found passion for her new line of work.

As part of her commitment to providing high quality after school care, Nisha enrolled in the child care certificate

program offered at CDI College. She had already begun part-time training when she learned about an educational bursary being offered to child care professionals through the Alberta Child Care Network Association and funded by Alberta Children and Youth Services.

Once her bursary application was approved, Nisha received \$4,500 towards her training, which sufficiently covered the cost of tuition and textbooks to complete one year of post-secondary coursework in early childhood. Upon completion, she will be qualified for Level 2 certification in child care. Her only additional training-related costs are for public transit and babysitting when her husband works evening and weekend shifts.

"It would be really hard to pay for college fees and babysitters. I don't think I would be able to continue without the bursary," stated Nisha. "It really helps me and I am very thankful."

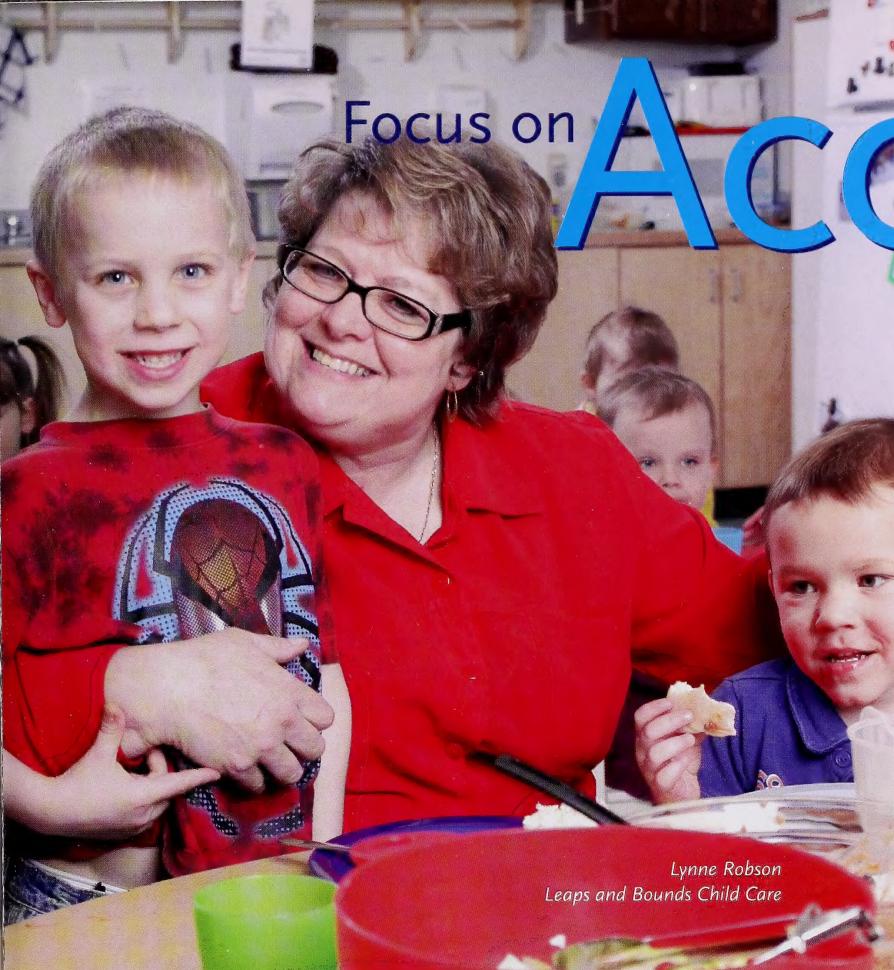
Planning age-appropriate activities, preparing nutritious kid-friendly snacks, and handling problem behaviours are some of the important skills Nisha has learned while in training. Next year, hopefully with the help of another bursary, she plans to further her education by taking the second year of coursework that will qualify her for Level 3 certification in child care.

"For me, it really helps to get more education. It's helping with my own kids too," said Nisha.

While Nisha has found herself once again balancing a hectic evening and weekend schedule, she realizes it is a short-term sacrifice for long-term benefit. Eventually she hopes to expand Wye Out-of-School Care to a full day care program. ●



Nisha Sharma,
Wye Out-of-School Care



Focus on Access

Providing Parents with Greater Access to Child Care

The Making Space for Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund was developed in 2007 to promote the creation of new child care spaces throughout Alberta, particularly in regions where shortages in child care spaces were limiting parents' opportunities for returning to the workforce.

Eligible owners and operators are invited to apply for a one-time start up grant to help provide more physical space to accommodate children in their child care program. Grants of up to \$1,500 per new space (\$2,000 in Fort McMurray and area) are available to help cover the cost of the following:

- materials and supplies (e.g., toys, equipment and furnishings)
- planning costs (e.g., business plan development)
- minor capital costs (e.g., minor renovations).

With the help of the Making Space for Children grant, thousands of additional spaces have been opened for children across Alberta. At the end of March 2008, almost 3,500 new child care spaces were created in 51 Alberta communities.

Lynne Robson

Child Care Centre Operator,
Leaps and Bounds Child Care, Stettler

There was a period of time when Lynne Robson was extremely frustrated because every day she was forced to turn away families in need of child care. As the only child care centre serving the immediate area, Stettler Regional Child Care Society was in high demand and had no room for additional children in its day care, out-of-school care, playschool or family day homes.

Recognizing the need for additional child care space, Lynne began looking for a new satellite facility that could accommodate the growing needs of the community. She explored all her options, including churches and rental buildings.

That's when Lynne was approached by Clearview Public School Division and asked to form a partnership. The school division offered to fix up a large room in an under-utilized wing of William E. Hay Composite High School to accommodate a new day care facility. The space was an ideal size; however, it was in need of a complete transformation.

Leaps and Bounds Child Care opened with only the basics. Soon after, Lynne was approved for \$24,000 in grant funding from the Making Space for ▶

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*Bitter are the
tears of a child:
Sweeten them.*

*Deep are
the thoughts
of a child:
Quiet them.*

*Sharp is the
grief of a child:
Take it from him.*

*Soft is the
heart of a child:
Do not harden it.*

— Pamela Glencorner

► Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund to cover the start-up costs of the new day care centre.

The funding assisted with the creation of 16 new child care spaces and covered the cost of new flooring, child-sized toilets, new tables and chairs, extra shelving, sand and water tables, children's furniture, toys and a cushioned surface for the outdoor playground.

"We couldn't have made Leaps and Bounds viable without the Making Space for Children grant because we had to initially borrow resources to open the centre," said Lynne.

The community of Stettler is "enthralled" with the new child care centre, which is unique. For example, although it is run as a day care, children are not segregated by age.

"Leaps and Bounds has all the programming of a day care within a family setting. Parents really like to send siblings to the same place," explained Lynne.

The concept was initially developed to keep families with multiple children together. The centre has proved useful in teaching children respect for each others abilities and has helped to foster a culture where older children assist the younger ones with simple tasks.

In addition, nine of the 16 children at the day care have high needs. Given the proximity of the day care to the neighbouring school, these children now have access to pre-kindergarten classes, speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy.

Lynne is convinced that the partnership arrangement with Clearview Public School Division has "helped to facilitate as smooth a path as possible from child care to kindergarten for children with high needs."

The creation of 16 extra child care spaces in the community of Stettler has helped many parents, especially single moms, return to the workforce because they now have access to child care.

Leaps and Bounds has creatively addressed some staff shortages, utilizing the talents of students from the adjoining high school. These students work part-time after school under the supervision of senior child care staff, allowing the students to benefit from valuable work experience.

Once the students have completed the Orientation Course, they obtain Level 1 child care certification and will hopefully pursue a career in child care. ●

Kerri Cowell

Pre-School Provider, Smart Start Preschool, Spruce Grove

Kerri Cowell began registration in February for Smart Start Preschool's fall 2008 kindergarten readiness class, and it was full within two weeks.

Smart Start Preschool opened its doors in October 2007 with help from the Making Space for Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund. The creation of 12 new preschool spaces has

helped to relieve some of the pressure in the growing community of Spruce Grove, west of Edmonton.

The new preschool caters to children of stay-at-home parents. It offers two different programs for children: playschool and pre-kindergarten. The preschool program provides a social environment for children as young as

two and a half where they can interact and play with other children twice a week. The pre-kindergarten program is geared toward slightly older children and helps them to learn essential skills, like the alphabet, prior to entering kindergarten.

As a mother of two and a certificated teacher, Kerri passionately believes in the importance of social interaction, early literacy and building self-esteem in children prior to entering a formal school setting. That's why she took the initiative to open a preschool.

"As a teacher in the school system who's seen kids who stayed home and kids who have had preschool, it makes a big difference when they get to kindergarten," said Kerri.

Initially, Kerri borrowed used resources including mismatched tables and chairs to open the preschool. Then, when she received grant funding from Making Space for Children, Kerri was able to buy new furniture and accessories, including child-sized chairs, play equipment, high-quality educational tools and shelving units. She is pleased that the funding assisted with buying superior grade toys that will withstand the wear and tear of preschool children over the next 10 to 15 years. Examples of the new toys are a dollhouse, school-quality hula hoops, and a parachute used for gross motor development.

"The quality of [the programs] I have to offer has greatly improved because of the grant funding I was given," added Kerri.

While the grant funding was intended to create 12 new spaces, Kerri has actually been able to create 24 spaces by offering two different preschool programs twice a week. ●



*Kerri Cowell
Smart Start Preschool*

Focus on

Excellence

The 2008 Alberta Child Care Professional Awards of Excellence recognize 10 child care providers for their outstanding professional contributions. The awards celebrate professionals who work in licensed day cares, nursery schools, or out-of-school care programs and approved family day homes throughout Alberta's urban and rural communities.



Urban Day Care
Jennifer Bly
King Edward Child Care Centre, Edmonton

This award evokes an indescribable emotion in me. I love what I do and I am passionate about my job. Receiving this award means that someone has seen my commitment and believes in my abilities as a child care professional.



Rural Day Care
Pat Young
Children's World Day Care, Pincher Creek

This recognition gives me even greater excitement and more passion to carry

on in the child care field for many more years to come. I want to have a positive and professional impact on the people I work with – parents, children, families throughout the community, and other colleagues in the field.



Rural Family Day Home
Tracy Davis-McMillan

Innisfail Family Day Home Society, Innisfail

Being recognized by the parents of the children I care for, as well as my colleagues, is an honour because they are the ones that see the results of what's happening in my home on a daily basis and truly felt I deserved this award.



Urban Family Day Home
Robin Matrai

Children's Choice Community Child Care Services, Calgary

I love my kids, their parents and my colleagues! We are the proverbial village and, truly, we work together to provide the best care for each child. I feel humbled that they value me so deeply.



Urban Nursery School
Rose Maynard
Alexandra Playschool, Calgary

I am newly inspired in my work right now. I think I have

been successful in educating parents and confirming for them that indeed young children deserve lots of time to play. Young children deserve to be immersed in beautiful environments, language that is rich and a program that supports their quest for movement.



Rural Nursery School

Lynne Ings

Rimbev Nursery School, Rimbev

I feel honoured, thrilled and a bit overwhelmed. I see being recognized in this way as a validation of my beliefs about children and their development. It is wonderful to be nominated for an award like this; it says to me that my parents agree with and value what we are offering to their children.



Urban Out-of-School Care

Lynette Bowers

Ivy Lake Sensations Out of School Program, Grande Prairie

Most of us who stay in this sector do so because we have a passion for children and are dedicated to their well-being and social development. The children and their families have deeply impacted my life in a positive, significant way, and to be endorsed for doing what I love...is icing on the cake.



Rural Out-of-School Care

Shirley Webster

Beaumont After School Care, Beaumont

I think excellence in the child care profession would look like a smile. You never know what it will look like when you try something new, but you

always hope for the best. And if it all works out as planned then you have the smiles. But "excellence" can never be held over to the next day. The smiles have achieved the excellence for one day and one day only. Tomorrow we have to try all over again.



Cultural Practices

Malgorzata Lawicka

Southgate Medallion Family Day Homes, Edmonton

Winning this award means a lot to me. It makes me more aware of the important work I do with children when families applaud me for my contribution to the child care sector. It makes me proud of my work and makes me feel very happy.



Special Needs

Jan Wregget

Time to Play Preschool, Airdrie

I love my job and work hard at having the best preschool I know how so all the children who attend have a positive learning environment. This award makes me realize that I am on the right track... it means I made the right choice 37 years ago to take my education in teaching.

For information about the programs in *Spotlight on Child Care*, visit the Alberta Children and Youth Services website at www.child.alberta.ca or contact our office at:

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